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SUBJECT: Belgium's Newest Anti-Terrorism Tool

¶1. (SBU) The Belgian House of Representatives has approved the creation of a new tool for combatting terrorism, the "Coordination Agency for Analyzing Threats" also known as "OCAM" (or "OCAD" in Dutch). The decision follows about eighteen months of debate; the Senate's pro forma approval is expected shortly. The new agency will centralize all relevant security information and assess all potential threats, enhancing the current "Interforces Anti-Terrorism Group" (GIA), which has spearheaded Belgium's anti-terrorism drive since the early nineties. OCAM should be operational by the end of the year, according to officials in the Interior Ministry and the Prime Minister's Office.

¶2. (SBU) Belgium's experience in establishing a clearinghouse of information sharing on terrorism mirrored developments in other western countries, including the U.S. As more Belgian ministries and agencies became involved in the war on terror, an acute need grew for an agency to centralize security and threat information. OCAM will have a staff of approximately 50 people, recruited from among the police and intelligence services, as well as several other agencies - the Finance, Interior, Transportation, and Foreign Affairs Ministries, and the Customs and the Immigration Office. OCAM will operate under the joint control of the Interior and Justice Ministers and be headed by an as yet unidentified magistrate. The Ministerial Committee for Intelligence and Security, a committee composed of leading ministers and chaired by the Prime Minister, will determine the agency's agenda.

¶3. (U) Implementing anti-terror policy will remain the exclusive domain of the federal police, the courts, and relevant ministerial departments. In drafting this new legislation, the Belgian government has sought to create a system requiring all officials and services involved in counterterrorism to supply relevant information to OCAM. Under the new law, withholding information will become a violation of the criminal code. The new agency will share information with responsible ministers, the courts, and federal magistrates, as well as the Belgian Crisis Center. The parliamentary oversight will be conducted jointly by the existing parliamentary watchdog Committees "I" for intelligence and "P" for police. Attempts to obtain direct parliamentary control over the new agency failed, but legislators plan an additional bill clarifying their role.

¶4. (SBU) Legal requirements for channeling information to OCAM has raised serious issues for Belgium's State Security agency, the Surete, which previously considered

itself as having a special role in combating terrorism. Koen Dassen, Surete head at the time the bill was debated, warned lawmakers that under the prevailing "third party rule" it was not always possible for Surete to share information when the information comes from foreign intelligence services. Dassen's superiors, including Justice Minister Laurette Onkelinx, countered by saying OCAM would operate similarly to the British Joint Terrorism Analysis Center by having all appropriate protections for classified material.

15. (SBU) Comment: Plans to create OCAM contributed to the firing of Surete Director General Dassen earlier this year. The issue also prompted an appeal by Flemish Socialist party leader Johan Vande Lanotte, who called limitations on the Surete's autonomy and its eventual integration into the Federal Police. This step does not appear likely, at least over the short-term. End Comment  
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